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ABSTRACT

Using a case study of a client with common problems in placing women in non-traditional positions, this speech raises questions of diagnosis and intervention and presents an alternative organizational model that is then applied to the case study. The organizational model emphasizes four components: (1) mission (purpose or rationale for existence of the organization); (2) power (driving force, providing energy for members to achieve the mission or purpose); (3) structure (formal and informal policies and procedures); and (4) resources (means or assets). Based on the work of Robert Terry, the organizational model described is normative in nature and focuses on what the individual needs to be authentic. This approach differs from most interventions which tend to focus on structure, i.e., changing policies, or resources, i.e., giving assertiveness or career development training; this model focuses on the major issues involved (the power and mission components of the organization) while supporting such resources as the acquisition of new gender skills for men. Although not cost productive, this approach is cost-preventive--preventing the higher cost of large turnover and failure rates in placing women in non-traditional jobs. (MEK)

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Making Transitions Work: Overcoming Resistance and Avoiding Failure in The Placement of Women in Non-Traditional Jobs

Introduction

In this session we will:

- Present a case study of a client with some common problems in placing women in non-traditional positions.
- Raise questions of diagnosis and intervention.
- Present an organizational model.
- Apply model to the case study.

The Case Study

A sales division of a major automotive company is divided into several regions in the country. The sales and service representatives for the sales division are located in widely dispersed geographical areas working autonomously calling on local dealers. The representatives travel frequently most days of the week. The practice in this division has been that movement up within the division is dependent on one's willingness to move where there is an opening in another geographical area. If a representative is unwilling to move, upward mobility is automatically limited. As is typical in the automotive industry in sales and in dealerships areas, this organization is very male oriented with a strong "macho" image. Women have a "girly" or dumb and beautiful image. Indeed, women have resisted entering this organization as sales and service representatives because of their own view that women don't fit in this business.

There has been pressure from the corporate headquarters in this industry for equal employment opportunity and affirmative action. The initial response for this division was to identify and promote from within. Those targeted for such promotion tended to be favorite secretaries and "girlfriends" who were promoted based on their image and other questionable criteria rather than their ability to perform. When these women who were initially promoted began to fail, the suspicians and distrust held by many men in the organization were confirmed.

When recruitment of women outside the system begain, again, the organization ran into major difficulty. Men recruited from college campuses have come from diverse majors. It did not usually matter because young men have traditionally been prepared to understand and know automobiles and to operate in the business world. Women have traditionally been sheltered from understanding automobiles and the business world. Therefore, the assumption was that women could only be recruited from business school and there weren't enough women in business school to recruit.

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Women who majored in French literature, liberal arts or general social sciences were not viewed either by themselves or by the organization as potential employees for an automotive sales division.

The organization also tried a career development program, identifying women internally who could move into the sales side of the business. However, in attempting this effort the system ran directly into a major problem, the tradition of rotation. Personnel recruited from a salaried employee training program were asked by the Personnel Director to sign a commitment to accept positions in the normal rotation wherever openings occurred. This system was based on the notion that men and women would be treated equally. Following this process, women took positions around the country where the openings were in normal rotation. However, there were a high number of failure rates. Women taking normal rotation ended up in out-of-the way and difficult places such as the example of one black woman assigned to Fargo, North Dakota.

The final area of problems we will discuss which this company has experienced, focus on the individual woman hired. Young women who were hired, unmarried, worked for a few years, got married and then didn't want to move, so they resigned. Single women accepted open positions in small towns and found it difficult to make firends, gain social acceptance and feel comfortable in the community. Women throughout organizations have been subjected to sexual harassment, male resentment, lack of dealer acceptance and lack of management rapport.

All of these problems have led the client to make a request for help in reducing the turnover of women in this non-traditional job situation. If you were the consultant, what would be your diagnosis and what interventions would you make?

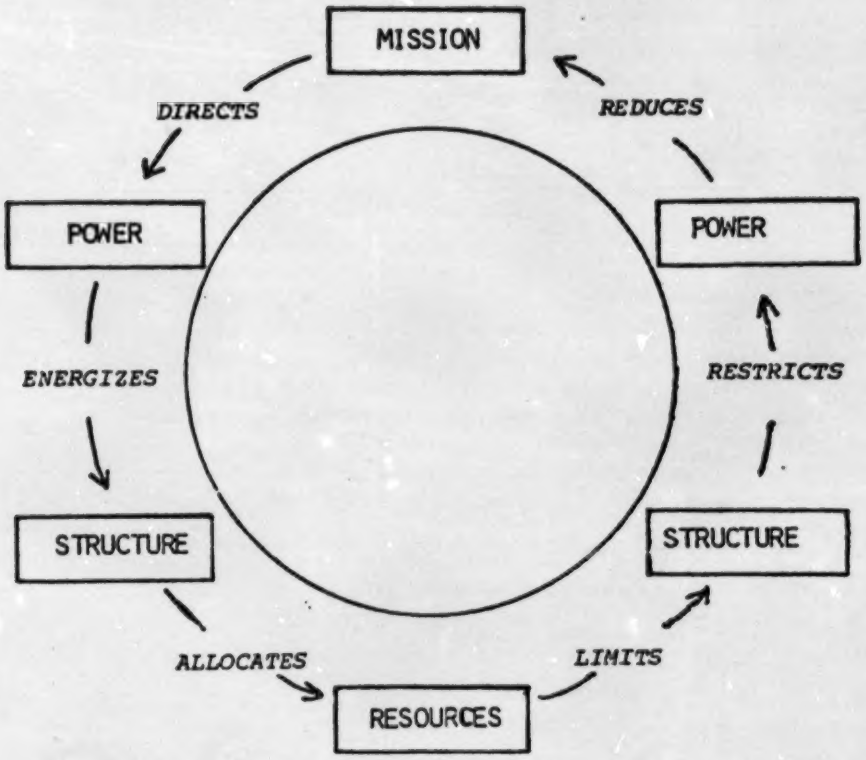
Organizational Model

As with most consultants, I am suggesting the use of an organizational model to guide and direct the diagnosis and intervention on this problem. The model which I use is an energy model of an organization which focuses on the question, "What is it that activates and mobilized the organization?", rather than, "How does the organization function and structure itself to maintain equilibrium?". This model emphasizes four components. The mission of an organization is the purpose, rationale, reason for existence and give direction to the organization. The second component is the power in the organization which drives the organization, provides energy for members to move it toward the mission and purpose. Energy comes from the decision making process. The third component is structure. The structure of the organization is composed of policies, procedures and rules both formal and informal which give form and control the interaction of members in the organization. The fourth component is the resources of the organization which are means or assets which enable the organization to move toward the mission.

In this model it is the mission which gives direction to the power component in the organization which in turn energized the structure. It is the structure which allocates the resources of the organization. On the other hand, resources may limit the structure which in turn restricts the power which reduces the mission. The following chart depicts the process.

CHART 1

RELATIONSHIP OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMPONENTS



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Most of us carry pictures of an ideal organization which creates a normative organizational model. My ideal organization uses the organizational model described by first looking at what the individual needs to be authentic. Here I am using authentic to mean credible, genuine, true to self and true to the reality. The authentic individual is one who:

a) Has a positive identity, knows where she/he is going, has congruence between values and behaviors.

b) Has the capacity to take charge of his/her own life; doesn't have to depend on others; and can make and carry out decisions.

c) Seeks and receives on-going support and challenge. Has a relatively stable base which provides caring and positive reinforcement as well as opportunities for constructive feedback and growth.

d) Has adequate resources for daily living; i.e., housing, food, clothing, medical care and other basic necessities.

Thus the ideal organization is also authentic and provides a setting where individual members of the organization can be authentic. (See Chart 2) Such an organization might be described as possessing these characteristics:

a) Clear mission which defines the purpose, why we are doing what we are doing, why it is worth doing, and allows for diversity in accomplishing that mission.

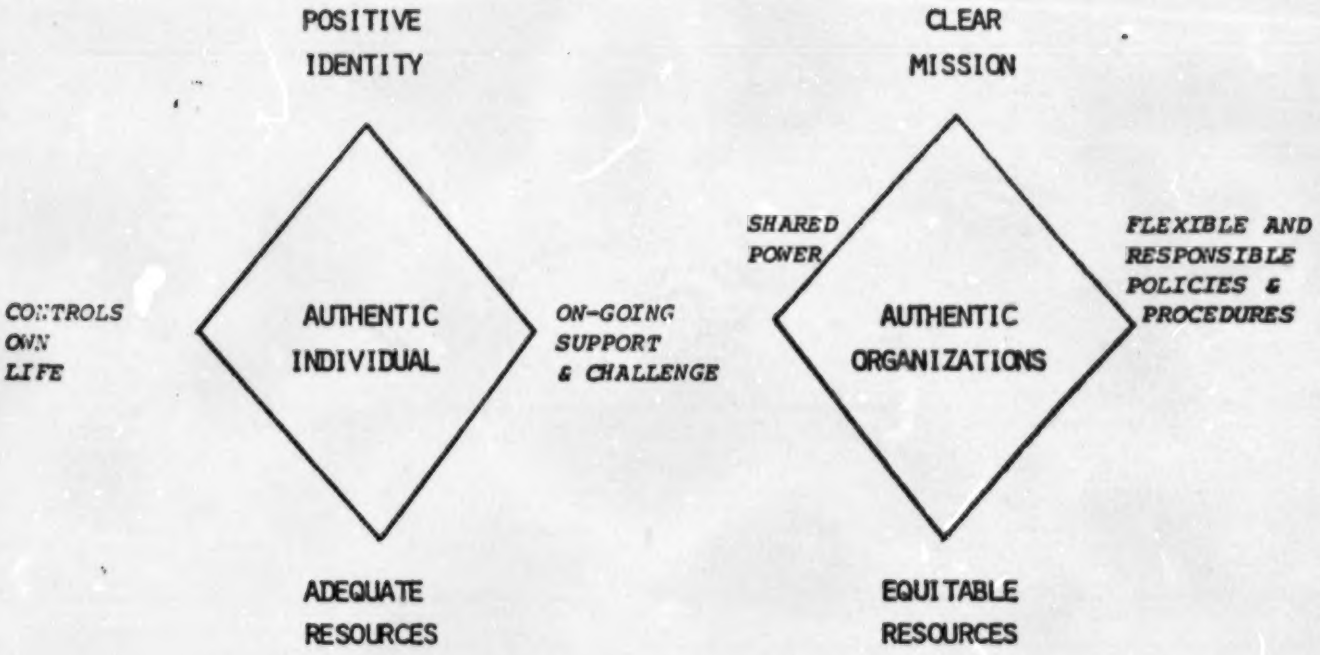
b) Shares power situationally; i.e., members are involved in decision making based on knowledge, information, skill and circumstances of the members.

c) Policies, practices and procedures which are flexible and responsive to the diversity of the members and can provide individuals both support and challenge.

d) Resources distributed equitably, not necessarily equally. We do not all need the same resources; therefore, equal is not adequate.

CHART 2

NORMATIVE MODEL



Diagnosis

Returning now to our case example, let's use this model to diagnose the program to place women in the sales division of this major automotive company. (By focusing on the parts of the organization involved in the program to place women, we will be applying the term mission differently than might be used in other applications such as management by objectives.)

Mission: One of the major problems identifiable in this case is an unclear mission. The organization is not clear whether they will utilize the principle of equal opportunity and treat men and women equally as in their decision to require trainees in a career development program to expect available jobs in normal rotation. Or, whether they will affirmatively take action to correct past inequities related to women in this organization such as identifying promotable women from within the organization or doing active recruiting on college campuses.

Power: It is quite clear in this organization that the decision regarding the inclusion of women have been made at the top, even beyond this division at the corporate level. Action has been ordered that women be included in the division ranks. A decision making process which is clearly so top down is likely to result in a lack of commitment by management of this division.

Another aspect of power is that men within the organization are clearly exercising their greater portion of power to intimidate, harass and deny support to women in the organization.

Structure: Clearly, the past policies and procedures are continuing to be rigidly applied. That is, there is only one way up in the organization and that is to move from one area to another as positions are open in normal rotation. No new policies and procedures to clarify roles and facilitate and support acceptance of women have been developed.

Resources: The organization has taken a position of treating men and women equally. Women are provided equal opportunity to take jobs in Fargo, North Dakota, to have promotions available to them in Winslow, Kansas, and to be treated in the same equal fashion that men have been treated. However, the organization has not recognized that women are not coming into the organization with the same set of resources nor does the community in general nor the company provide them the same set of resources that men can draw on, i.e., community support, contacts, familiarity with cars in the business and the jargon. Therefore, we might say that resources are equal but not necessarily equitable.

In addition, the men in the organization have not been provided resources to manage and work with women professionals as peers and colleagues in what has been all male and "macho" organization.

Intervention Plan

The Intervention Plan outlined below begins with top management emphasizing the mission and power components with less emphasis on structure and resources. The second trust of the intervention focuses on middle management with the major emphasis on power and structure. The third phase of the intervention focuses on first line supervision and entry level employees. At this level, the emphasis of the intervention is on the structure and resources.

Top Management

. Mission: Clarity on mission of the program.

. Power: Commitment to program.

. Structure: Broad strokes of policies, plans and procedures for the program.

. Resources: Allocate the resources.

Middle Management

. Mission: Review and define the mission.

. Power: Explain top management commitment and gain commitment and involvement.

. Structure: Develop plan.

. Resources: Allocate the resources.

First Line Supervision/Entry Level Employees

. Mission: Review and define mission.

. Power: Explain organizational commitment and determine theirs.

. Structure: Determine how plans, policies and procedures will be implemented.

. Resources: Supervisory skills for implementation of plans, policies and procedures. Gender skills to cope with new role changes.

Conclusion

This approach differs from most interventions which tend to focus on structure, i.e., changing policies; or resources, i.e., giving training (assertiveness training, career development, etc.) to the women. Other approaches tend to overlook the major issues involved in the power and mission components or to ignore the resources needed by the men such as new gender skills.

An approach such as this, which is more inclusive of all involved components in the organization, is not going to be cost productive as many managers and consultants alike hope for. Rather, it is cost preventive - preventing the higher cost of high turnover and failure in placing women in non-traditional jobs.

[1] This model is based on a model developed by Robert Terry. See "Impact of White Racism on White Values and Actions" unpublished.